

Civic Center Task Force

January 23, 2006

At this meeting, the Task Force had a discussion about what they had heard in the previous meetings from presenters and citizens, and about what the purpose of the Civic Center should be for the future.

Expectations for the evening,

- Make sure that we move forward in reaching the overall goal of making a recommendation.
- Look at venues, venue types, programming, synergies offered to the city,
- How we are going to fund that
- How are we going to communicate that plan/goal.
- Go back and look at the objectives that City Council gave us at the outset.
- Identify partners that will help us move forward.
- Identify a plan of action to move the recommendation forward, including steps
- Expect that we will list all the possibilities to discuss and look at pros and cons, see where each member is, what their priorities are

Review: Where We've Been

Key Points

- HUB project presentation
- 60% of the revenue comes from the arena
- Of the benchmark facilities that were presented by staff:
 - Privately owned vs. publicly owned
 - 90% publicly owned
 - 53% were built since 1990
 - Average arena seating 11,000
 - 60% had arenas, 40% did not
 - Did not hear more about the ongoing subsidy required – leaves questions about future subsidies
- Seems that options will not necessarily put facility in the black
- Operational health can be addressed in different ways, including an endowment

Surprises? Learn something new?

- Most of the Facilities have a commission for public oversight
- The promoters were fairly complimentary of the facility
- Positive comments about staff came up several times.
- Building takes away from maximum utilization of labor
- Without changing facility or minimal changes, costs will go up
- Thomas Wolfe cannot be renovated to meet requirements.
- There was disagreement (between presenters) over PBCL study that suggests Wolfe can be renovated – width of stage.
- Agreement: Thomas Wolfe cannot be renovated for a performing arts theater.

- Civic Center Commission White paper: do very little, costs \$5 million, does not improve loading, future loss of events
- Agreement: Need to stress to City Council that we need to do something, doing nothing not an option
- Promoters said that they have acts that request to be here, change schedule to come to Asheville

What does the Community want? (also, what did they say)

- Other communities are looking to Asheville as the leader
- If we are going to continue Asheville's place as a center for arts, creativity, need a good venue, including an arena
- Real reason that we have Civic Centers is to have opportunities for experiences
- Community members have a history and experiences at the Civic Center
- Downtown businesses feel that the Civic Center is very important to their businesses, especially the multi-day events, and arena events
- Downtown Economy has to be a factor in decisions
- Variety of needs/wants in community – performing arts, gun shows – civic center has met needs for diverse community and needs to in the future.
- Heard that performing arts center needs to be downtown, but not as strongly about the arena's location
- Current location was favorable
- Some people think that the arena should stay downtown
- Main consensus heard was that the arena should be separate from the theater space.
- Parking and traffic could be alleviated if uses are separated – some disagreement about traffic issues
- River location would have access and traffic issues, and would involve working with partners (DOT, HUB, Riverlink)
- Possibility of looking at Biltmore Sq Mall
- Look at possibility of working with UNC-A
- Is there a way to partner with UNC-A, AB-Tech? City could potentially bring something to the table with parking. Is UNC-A looking for that type of partnership? (model from Raleigh? RBC Center)
- Heard from several folks about the importance of exhibition space.
- None of the proposals included much exhibition space, should be a part.
- Arena is important from a revenue perspective and sequencing perspective.
- Can't lose space for a long time, will lose customers
- Performing arts has strong support in the community
- Need for exhibition space and multi day events
- Have not heard strong case for conventions
- Grove Park Inn serves as a convention center – additional space would create need revenue –losing facility
- Difference between convention facility and venue that has additional space that can be used for conventions
- Continually heard that every segment of the community wants to have an entertainment facility.

- Clear need for performing arts, arena, exhibition, not convention space (conference space is a possibility with AACPA proposal)
- UNC-A and AB Tech have voiced desire to have students involved with performing arts/media center – need to expand the players to the other schools in the area – could also help with the funding possibilities

Other voices not present at Task Force meetings:

- Some citizens voice apathy about the Civic Center –
- Enrichment opportunities that are available because of the Civic Center
- Cultural life influences business relocation and can affect city's economy
- Tax base benefits all citizens of city and county, even if they don't take part
- Also hear about dark days at Civic Center
- Need to look at utilization of facility, and driving up the revenues
- Activity breeds activity
- Also hear from citizens that the current facility is ugly, facility should represent this area.

Moving Forward

- Have heard it should be either multi-use or additional buildings ideally in the city limits - core area, but can't close door completely to other areas.
- Arena should be easily accessible.
- Concerns about suburban arenas failing in other cities.
- Need to talk about funding
- If what we need for the civic center can be a part of a larger package for the community would have a better chance of being funded.
- Has to make sense budget-wise and realistic

Public Comment Section

- Looks like PAC is going to be built inside building or somewhere else; should depend on whether city can find a location for arena expeditiously. Would urge Task Force to look at land across the street for either PAC or arena. (Dwight Butner)
- Keep in mind that what is here that is an economic generator is a 7000 seat arena, 75,000 square feet of exhibition space and 2400 seat auditorium. If you take any one of those out, affect the economic picture. Have heard that the multi-day events generate more business for downtown businesses (John Patterson)
- Should look at Renaissance hotel site for a performance arts center and would have a theater arts district (Peter Carver)
- Key point that City council can't do everything by itself. Would like to see City Council and other stakeholders with a will do attitude and their "weight forward". If City Council embraces a plan that embodies excellence and pride, there is a huge store of energy of people who will help make it happen. (Battle Haslam?)